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## A matrix of cognitive domains at the service of the metaphoric delegitimisation of politicians



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### ABSTRACT

Based on the triadic relationship that exists between discourse, cognition and society, this work analyses a matrix of cognitive domains that, through the mapping of metaphors, creates a delegitimising image of the politician.

This matrix is composed of three conceptual frames that share the characteristic of presenting politicians as professionals in the art of lies, deceit and fraud: the first, *DECORATION OF MAKE-UP*, identifies the world of politics with actions aimed at decorating, adorning or embroidering reality in order to conceal its true nature; the second scenario, *COMMERCE*, interprets the topic in question as a market of low value in which the retailer, the politician, makes use of often opaque strategies in order to camouflage their product and make it look like something which it is not; the matrix is completed by the framework *DREAM OF FANTASY*, which portrays the politician as a person who adorns, covers up or ignores the things that they do not wish to see, spuriously creating alternative worlds that respond to their own interests.

Drawing on a corpus made up of political opinion articles taken from the most widely-distributed Spanish newspapers, we analyse the metaphoric correspondences established between the conceptual structures that these focus yield, and the topic studied.

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### 1. Theoretical and conceptual framework: discourse, cognition and society

This work is based on the triadic relationship between discourse, cognition and society (van Dijk, 1997), which allows an understanding of how social interaction is constructed and articulated through discursive activity, mediated by cognitive processes. Discourse is the scenario in which, through diverse strategies, the identities of interlocutors are constructed, both at the level of the individual and of the social group with which they share attitudes, beliefs and values (Cameron and Maslen, 2010: 3); discourse is also, as we will see, a reflection of the concerns, worries and transformations that arise within that scenario.

We therefore identify with a field of research that defends the confluence of the heterogeneous disciplines of Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Linguistics but, at the same time, complements the study of texts by integrating their social and ideological dimension with an individual and cognitive dimension (Chilton, 2004, 2005; van Dijk, 1997, 1998, 2009; Dirven et al., 2007; Hart, 2014; Kövecses, 2015; Musolff and Zinken, 2009; Semino, 2008;

Steen, 2011; Wodak, 2006; Zinken, 2003). With reference to this, Hart (2015: 322) states that

On the one hand, Cognitive Linguistics offers CDA the ‘missing link’ (cf. Chilton, 2005) it needs to explain the relationship between discursive and social practices. But on the other hand, CDA offers Cognitive Linguistics the opportunity to extend its analyses beyond linguistic and conceptual structure to include the constraints that these place on societal structure.

According to Maalej (2007: 137), Critical Discourse Analysis has dealt principally with local aspects such as lexis, syntax or modality, and has paid little attention to the conceptual structures that underlie discourse. Precisely, one of the great benefits of this union of two disciplines has been the study of conceptual metaphor, an idealised cognitive model<sup>1</sup> which makes it possible to categorise complex abstract topics through their mapping onto simpler, more concrete, and therefore more accessible vehicles (Johnson, 1987, 1993; Koller, 2005; Kövecses, 2009, 2010; Lakoff, 1987, 2008;

<sup>1</sup> Lakoff (1987: 68–90) conceives the metaphor, together with frame, metonymy and image schema, as an idealised cognitive model, that is, as mental structures through which we categorise, organise and simplify our world knowledge. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez (2004: 6) highlights the basic characteristics of the idealised cognitive model as it is understood in Cognitive Linguistics.

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Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Lakoff and Turner, 1989; Soares da Silva, 2013, 2016; Stockwell, 2001; Sweetser, 1990; Turner, 1991).<sup>2</sup> As Gibbs (2014: 38) affirms, this study can only be approached from a sociocognitive perspective:

Examining real-life discourse offers significant insights into the dynamics of metaphor in social life that may also lead to a more social, discursive view of metaphor, one that still sees metaphor as part of thought, but as socially emergent cognition, not just as private concepts buried inside people's heads.

Political discourse, understood in the broad sense as all speech acts that incite action (van Dijk, 1999), has traditionally used this strategy which, in the words of Beer and de Landtsheer (2004: 6), is “part of the political struggle for collective meaning, the interpretation of the forms or patterns of human political life”. In the context of political communication, metaphor provides important cognitive benefits (Crawford, 2014; Landau et al., 2010; Lippmann, 1922), because it allows the complexity and abstraction of politics to be reduced to simpler, more manageable models. As Landau et al. (2010) affirm, human beings are cognitive Scrooges and, given that abstraction requires a greater effort in processing, it is often managed through metaphor. Edelman (1971) also points to such gains; for him, the cognitive structure of metaphor involves a relationship between the part and the whole, making it an efficient process for alluding to wider and more complex issues, while Ortony (1975) similarly, attributes to it a quality of compactness that highlights its ability to concisely communicate a large quantity of information.

Together with the economy of discourse processing, researchers of the metaphor as a tool for persuasion (for example, Mio, 1997; Charteris-Black, 2005) highlight its capacity for linking reason and emotion, combining a central route of persuasion, using natural and rational logic, with a peripheral route which is emotional and irrational (Burgoon and Bettinghaus, 1980; Burgoon and Miller, 1971; Chaiken and Stangor, 1987; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Reardon, 1981). One of the most powerful attributes of this idealised cognitive model resides in its appraisal dimension (Martin and White, 2005): this appraisal category, of great importance in the research of persuasive devices (Bednarek, 2006), refers to the expression of evaluations of the ethics, morality, or social values of people's behaviour. In this sense, the metaphor is an appraisal procedure, since it contributes to establishing the attitudinal position of the user in relation to the events and those involved in them; through these mappings, not only do we export realities from selected vehicles, but also, more importantly, our beliefs, our attitudes, our emotions and our judgements regarding the vehicles themselves. Through this exercise of framing the topic of discourse in a specific conceptual domain, the metaphor contributes to developing one of the strategic functions of political discourse, which is either to legitimise or, to the contrary, to delegitimise through positive self-representation in opposition to the negative representation of the other (Chilton and Schäffner, 1997; van Dijk, 1998).

Naturally, because our work is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, our theoretical framework is completed by notions arising from the field of Cognitive Semantics which, since it considers language as a window for the study of human cognition (Valenzuela et al., 2012: 43), has placed emphasis on the principle that an adequate understanding of linguistic expressions requires their denotative meaning to be completed with their pragmatic, contextual,

cultural or social meaning. The meaning of such expressions constitutes a mental process that goes beyond language and is the result of the individual's conceptual representations; the word, the linguistic element, therefore, is the access node (Langacker, 1987: 163) to this network of knowledge derived from the speaker's experience. Cognitive Linguistics has attempted to explain the structure of this knowledge network through diverse terms such as *frame* (Fillmore, 1982), *scenario* (Fillmore, 1985), *domain* (Lakoff, 1987) or *script*<sup>3</sup> (Schank and Abelson, 1977) which, despite their diverse origins, in their essence coincide (Croft and Cruse, 2004: 8), since all of the proposals may be understood as systems of related concepts where, in order to understand one part of the network, it is necessary to know and understand the whole structure of which it forms a part. Therefore, concepts are not independent elements but form part of mental and cultural models: the former explain the fact that people construct their own personal representations of an event with their own perspective, interests, evaluation, emotions and other elements (van Dijk, 2009: 22). Cultural models, for their part, represent socially shared knowledge and are conceived as “knowledge structures representing the collective wisdom and experience of the community, acquired and stored in the individual minds of the members of a community” (Dirven et al., 2007: 1217). Consequently, the choice of a source domain onto which the topic of discourse is figuratively mapped through metaphoric conceptualisation cannot be understood separately from these models, from their intention, from their conventions, or from the social and cultural behaviour of the participants in communication. They must be interpreted in a cognitive, social and cultural context (Palmer, 1996; Sharifian and Palmer, 2007).

## 2. Objectives

With this understanding of discourse events as specific manifestations of social interaction (Cameron, 2010: 3), we propose an analysis of the metaphoric conceptualisation of the public servant and their activity in a corpus of texts (described below) referring to political communication. Since this conceptualisation comprises heterogeneous dimensions, among which we identify both positive and negative traits, we will select a matrix made up of three cognitive domains (Langacker, 1987: 147–152) on which, through a series of metaphoric mappings, a delegitimisation (van Dijk, 1998) of the politician—and their surrounding world—is created, causing them to become discredited due to their categorisation as a professional liar, fraudster and cheat.

The domains DECORATION and MAKE-UP, COMMERCE and MARKETING, and finally, DREAM and FANTASY, although different, share a common trait and therefore, form a matrix (Langacker, 1987: 152)<sup>4</sup> which reiterates, through different scenarios, the conceptualisation of the professional politician as a person who uses fraud to falsely gain the trust of citizens.<sup>5</sup> As Sánchez García states (2007: 208–9):

[...] framing is a fundamental cognitive strategy to organise our experience of reality, to conceptually structure or make sense of

<sup>2</sup> Considerations about the need to unite Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Linguistics have given rise to the so-called *Critical Metaphor Theory* (Charteris-Black, 2004, 2005: 26), which establishes links between the cognitive, social and linguistic components of discourse and constitutes “an approach to the analysis of metaphor that aims to identify the intentions and ideologies underlying language use”.

<sup>3</sup> Croft and Cruse (2004: 17), following Schank and Abelson (1977), consider that the script is a specific type of frame or domain which can be distinguished by its dynamic nature, since it describes a canonic sequence of events that are presupposed by a determined social activity.

<sup>4</sup> Other terms for the concept of ‘domain’ proposed by Langacker (1987: 152) exist, such as ‘domain structure’ (Croft, 1993), ‘radial network’ (Lakoff, 1987; Langacker, 1991a, 1991b; Rice, 1996) or ‘maximal scope’ (Langacker, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> This paper is part of a larger research aimed to discover the conceptual domains used to discredit the politicians. The delegitimising matrix we analyse here can be expanded to include other domains as spectacle and theatre, which political reporting often resorts to in order to undermine public leaders and their world. However, the scope of meaning and the metaphoric mapping that this particular domain encompasses in our corpus is so extensive that we propose a separate study (Pinero, forthcoming).

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